



Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.

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**Testimony
submitted to the
Education Committee
March 11, 2015**

**SB 1058 AN ACT CONCERNING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM
SB 1054 AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA
SB 1056 AN ACT CONCERNING THE EXCESS COST THRESHOLD AND THE COLLECTION OF
DATA RELATING TO PER PUPIL COSTS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION
SB 1059 AN ACT CONCERNING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

CABE applauds the focus on SB 1058, An Act Concerning Chronic Absenteeism. Regular attendance is a habit that must be nurtured, while removing barriers for students getting to class which include transportation, access to health care and safety on the route to school. The use of chronic attendance data to trigger a timely response in collaboration with families and community partners is critical. However, we are concerned that Sections 2 and 3 of SB 1058 may impose additional bureaucratic burdens. It is critical that the absenteeism prevention and intervention plans be workable and tailored to the needs of the students and families in the individual schools. A symposium in Connecticut several years ago focused on chronic absenteeism and its impact on the achievement gap. In addition to national experts, parents from New Britain described their efforts to increase student attendance by creating a “walking school bus” where parent volunteers escorted students to school each morning, and helped to develop a ritual within their neighborhood of families having their children ready for school. It is important to encourage these very local initiatives to be part of efforts to address absenteeism. In addition, if the State Department of Education is to engage in additional data collection efforts, it would be important to utilize that data to identify best practices and make the information available to school districts. We urge you to take these issues into consideration as you review this bill.

CABE is concerned that SB 1054, An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia, adds yet another specific area to the already lengthy list of in-service training requirements. There is a finite amount of time available, and local school districts should have flexibility to design their in-service training to meet the needs of their students and staff.

CABE strongly supports SB 1056, An Act Concerning the Excess Cost Threshold and the Collection of Data Relating to Per Pupil Costs for Special Education, which would phase in a lower threshold at which the special education cost grant is triggered. However, it is critical that the cap on the special education cost grant be removed if this legislation is to provide the relief that school districts so desperately need. The excess cost grant was designed as a safety net for districts facing extraordinarily high special education costs for individual student placements. It is the cap on this grant which destroys that safety net, and leaves districts reimbursed for only a portion of the funds to which they are entitled. This reduces the ability of school districts to serve the needs of all students enrolled in the district, and creates fiscal uncertainty at the local level.

CABE strongly supports SB 1059, An Act Concerning High School Graduation Requirements, which would postpone by one year the implementation of the new high school graduation requirements. However, CABE believes that it is imperative that the year be used to examine the efficacy of these additional requirements in light of the other educational reforms that have taken place subsequent to the original adoption of this legislation. Increased credit requirements, end of course exams and additional subject area requirements are contrary to efforts to make high school a more personalized learning experience for students. We look forward to working with you to re-examine these requirements.

We appreciate your attention to these issues.